

PRIORITY

(Security Classification)

FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

31

DESP. NO.

August 25, 1960

DATE

FROM : AmConsul BASRA

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

REF : Contel 5, Aug 24, 1960, sent Baghdad 8, Khorramshahr 3, and previous. EUR-3

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	REC'D	OTHER
	9-1	(CIA) 10 Com-10 TR-3 OSD 4 ARMY-4 NAVY-2

SUBJECT: Resurgence of Shatt al-Arab Question

The question of jurisdiction over the Shatt al-Arab, which had been in abeyance for several months, was again raised to an active status by the unilateral action of the Iranian Government in seeking to take over jurisdiction of the berthing operations at Abadan, as reported in Khorramshahr's telegram of August 18, 1960, No. 7 to the Department.

As reported in Condes. 109 of June 14, 1960, the Iraqi Ports Administration was aware of the intention of the Government of Iran to take over this function, but apparently had not been informed officially of this prior to the interception by the Iraqi censors in Basra of a letter from Captain Steel to Captain Thompson relating to employment of the latter with the Iranian Government as a harbor-master in Abadan, which gave the date of August 27, 1960 as the date on which the Iranian Government intended to assume this responsibility. As reported in the Consulate's telegram under reference, the Director General of the Iraqi Ports Administration, Major General Mizhir al-Shawi, called a meeting of all shipping agents in Basra on the morning of August 24, 1960, in which he displayed a copy of the intercepted letter as evidence of the bad faith of the Iranian Government, and of the agents of the consortium, in this matter. According to a report of this meeting, General al-Shawi stated that two representatives of the consortium, Captain Steel and Captain Chuff, were due to come to Basra on August 25, 1960 for the purpose of discussing this problem, but one of the party had stated in a telephone conversation with the Port Administration that the sympathies of the consortium were on the side of the Iraqi Ports Administration. General al-Shawi apparently felt that the letter from Captain Steel to Captain Thompson was in direct contradiction to this stated position.

Following this exposition of the position of the Iraqi Ports Administration, General al-Shawi stated that the Port of Basra, as the controller of traffic in the Shatt al-Arab, would refuse to furnish pilots to any ship calling at Abadan which accepted the services of an Iranian harbor-master at Abadan on or after August 27, 1960. He stated that this position had been cleared with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Baghdad, which had endorsed his position.

The possible consequences of this position are many. First, any merchant

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ship calling at Abadan which carried cargo for Khorramshahr or Basra would not be able to proceed upstream without a pilot unless it contravened the regulations of the Iraqi Ports Administration. Secondly, any tanker calling at Abadan would not be able to depart from Abadan without incurring the same liability. Thirdly, any merchant ship calling at Abadan could be refused berthing or unloading facilities at Basra. This could be carried to the logical conclusion of forbidding the lightering of goods from Khorramshahr to Basra of any ship which had called at Abadan. And finally, any attempt on the part of the Iranian Navy to escort ships to and from Abadan, either to Khorramshahr or seawards, without an Iraqi pilot, could be construed by the Iraqis as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty.

The motivation of General al-Shawi in this case appears to be primarily a case of wounded ego, inasmuch as the Iranians have for several years performed the berthing functions at Khorramshahr, and there appears to be no good grounds on which they could be refused this same function at Abadan. However, the methods employed by the Iranian Government in this case leave much to be desired, and the irritation of the Iraqi Ports Administration, and ultimately the Iraqi Government, is understandable.

Due to the closing time of the Basra pouch, it is not possible to await the outcome of the meeting between General al-Shawi and the representatives of the consortium, who are apparently carrying a request that the berthing facilities furnished by the Iraqi Ports Administration at Abadan be discontinued. Further developments in the situation will be reported as they occur. In the meantime, it is clear that the attempts of the Iranian Government to avoid a full discussion of the question of jurisdiction over the Shatt al-Arab by resorting to unilateral action are merely confusing the issue and are resulting in an embitterment on the part of the Iraqi Government which will be a serious impediment to future agreement.

  
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American Consul

Copy sent to AmEmbassy Baghdad

Department pouch Tehran, London,  
Khorramshahr

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